

THE TENNESSEAN

Franklin seeks to expand work force housing **To amend residential plans, developers would have to support affordable homes**

By Kevin Walters • THE TENNESSEAN • March 9, 2010

A family with an annual household income of about \$51,000 could one day buy a new deed-restricted home in Franklin and pay no more than \$201,500 for it.

It's a possibility that Franklin Mayor John Schroer and city aldermen could make a reality if they pursue approving the city's first work force housing ordinance.

Aldermen are set to have their first discussion about the ordinance tonight.

Under the plan, residential developers who want city approval to change existing development plans to add more homes must also support affordable housing in some form, either with new or renovated affordably priced homes or by contributing money to build affordably priced houses.

It would be Franklin's strongest move to date after years of talking about creating a broader mix of housing in a county where last year the median price of a single family home was \$340,000.

"It's good for affordable-housing advocates, it's good for the community and it's good for the city," said David Pair, director of intergovernmental affairs with the Williamson County Association of Realtors.

As part of the plan, developers must make 10 percent of the new homes they build on previously approved developments affordably priced homes. For example, a developer who wants to change a plan from 250 homes to 300 homes must make five homes affordably priced.

But new development is excluded from the regulations as are developers who already have approval and don't want to add more homes to their sites.

The voluntary aspect of the proposal was key to getting support of the realty association.

"If you don't come in and ask for a change or revision to your site plan, you don't have to do anything," Pair said. "If it wasn't voluntary, we would probably be having a different conversation."

'More bang for the buck'

Developers of General's Retreat are among those who want more homes and are willing to make some of the new ones affordably priced.

Developers have presented plans to expand their Columbia Avenue development from 51 units to 77 units and would make three of the new units "affordably priced."

Nationwide, developers are trying to make homes more affordable in the wake of the national economic collapse, said Bill Kottas, one of the developers of General's Retreat.

"I think the buyer out there today is looking for more of a value purchase as opposed to the days of the McMansion," Kottas said. "Builders nationwide are trying to figure out more ways to provide more bang for the buck."

Though Schroer called the proposal "a baby step," he said it addresses the reality of a down market where developers have been unable to sell homes they had planned to build.

"It's not a good thing for anybody to have a product out there that can't be marketed," Schroer said. "I think it's incumbent upon us to look at options."

Aldermen will meet at 5 p.m. for their nonvoting work session and at 7 p.m. for their voting session.